

KES makes literacy its academic initiative

by Phyllis Dreger and
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Kaiserslautern Elementary School

For the 2002 – 2003 school year, the Department of Defense Dependent Schools and the KMC schools have made literacy their academic initiative. Kaiserslautern Elementary School has boarded the bandwagon and taken it further by making literacy a priority and a “Continuous School Progress” goal.

Kaiserslautern Elementary School gathered its educator and staff resources to make a profound mark on literacy in the school. Through pre-, mid- and post-testing strategies, KES pinpointed and identified gaps in its system. Each new student’s parent is interviewed by administration to ascertain the child’s individual needs. KES approached the problems with reconfigurations in its resources, including the realignment of teachers and the reassessment of academic funding.

“In order to make a literacy program work, you need staff support and common goals,” said KES Principal Dr. David Markewitz. “What we have here at KES is both.”

KES delivers the standard DODDS elementary curriculum with many teachers using Cheryl Sigmon’s “Four Blocks” balanced literacy strategies within the classroom. Because these strategies use all modalities in reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, students are better equipped to become effective and literate communicators.

“Reading at a student’s individual level meets the child’s needs,” said Pamela Hall, KES first- and second-grade teacher. “The brain works in patterns, and if you know which pieces you have, then the puzzle can be put together.”

The Four Blocks mentality is that all children are capable of being great readers, writers, listeners and speakers. It gives students the opportunity to learn to read in four different ways, one no better than the other, simply

geared toward the specific students learning skills and habits.

“Our literacy program is unique using the Four Blocks system because it is multi-level progress, which blends the traditional and progressive models of teaching,” said Brie Moon, KES first- and second-grade teacher. “Students learn by writing, guided reading (comprehension), selective reading and phonics. These are the best chances for everyone to learn to read.”

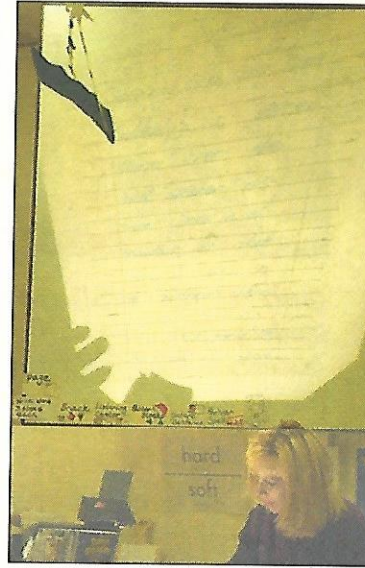
The KES goal is that all students will increase literacy across the curriculum. At KES, literacy is the ability to read, write, comprehend and communicate with proficiency. In the past three years, KES had 23 percent fewer students in the bottom two quartiles in reading, 14 percent less in language arts and 9 percent less in math.

“It’s not just test scores,” said Markewitz. “Test scores take care of themselves. The difference is when you work with kids, capitalize on strengths and recognize academic gaps.”

KES focuses on individuals rather than annual averages. The KES administration is responsible for motivating readers to self-correct and identify context, vocabulary, clues and pictures. The school pursues an academic balancing process.

Markewitz stated that “reading is a developmental process and KES looks at it [reading] developmentally.”

KES is a leader in the district, being a part of the pilot for the Read 180 program. In addition to standard programs, KES offers Reading Counts, reading recovery, TAG (gifted services), preschool services for children with disabilities, learning impaired, communication



Dr. Margaret Hoffman-Schmidt

Pamela Hall teaches students during the writing block how a good writer thinks when they go through the writing process.

impaired, speech therapy, occupational therapy and physical therapy. Compensatory education serves 129 students for extra help in math and reading.

KES uses the electronic report card, Success Maker, Teacher Associate, computer placement process and the first elementary school yearbook on CD in DODDS. KES manages a string orchestra program, as well as art enrichment, physical education enrichment, academic coaching, YOUNGNET Club, drama and soon will offer chorus. Students are also involved in various projects and math olympiads.

Parent involvement is encouraged with forums like the School Advisory Council, Parent Teacher Organization, mentoring and volunteerism.

The school is located on Vogelweh in the Kaiserslautern complex. Visit at <http://www.kais-es.eu.odedodea.edu> or call 0631-50611 or 488-7075, for more information.

Kaiserslautern Elementary School enrollment 2002-2003

Total enrollment

Pre-kindergarten through fifth grade:
660 students

52 percent Air Force

32 percent Army

16 percent civilian

.05 percent civilian dependent students